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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MINSK 001064

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [ODIP](#) [OFDP](#) [APER](#) [BO](#)
SUBJECT: LUKASHENKO THREATENS TO EXPEL AMBASSADOR

REF: A. MOORE-OPERATIONS CENTER E-MAIL 12/30/07
[1](#)B. KRAMER-MOORE E-MAIL 12/30/07

Classified By: Charge Jonathan Moore for reason 1.4 (d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) While addressing the press following a holiday visit to an orphanage December 30, Belarusian head of state Aleksandr Lukashenko threatened to expel the Ambassador should the USG impose additional economic sanctions on Belarus. GOB contacts have been reached by the Embassy but have not provided any comment; Charge confirmed that additional sanctions were to be expected in the absence of any progress from the regime. He also noted that any move to expel the Ambassador would lead to a reciprocal step by the USG. Please see a partial transcript of Lukashenko's remarks (para 2) and draft press guidance (para 4). End summary.

Lukashenko Promises Harsh Response If Sanctions Increased

[1](#)2. (SBU) As reported ref A, Aleksandr Lukashenko visited an "SOS" orphanage in Borovlyani December 30 and took some questions afterwards from the press. In response to a question from a journalist on the likelihood of additional U.S. sanctions on Belarus, which the Ambassador had discussed during an on-the-record roundtable with independent media December 13, Belarus' dictator promised a fierce response. His tirade was subsequently broadcast twice on state television and was covered widely on the internet. According to multiple sources, Lukashenko said:

"A question -- What have we done bad to the Americans? What have we done to the Americans that they would impose sanctions on us? We don't get mixed up in American internal affairs, do we? We don't disturb them; let them not disturb us. We have proposed to them dozens of times, 'Let's discuss things and cooperate normally. If there are problems, let's solve them.' But they don't want that. They want to overwhelm the country and trample the people. I won't let them."

"What have we done bad to the Americans? Some ambassador, like the American Ambassador, is going to sit around and blab about expanding sanctions. We will react in the harshest fashion, in all areas, politically, economically, and in other areas. As soon as it hits our economy substantially, the first who will be tossed out is the U.S. Ambassador. She attends opposition get-togethers and talks about potential economic sanctions for Belarus, which makes the situation more tense. I say this publicly. So, let the U.S. Ambassador calm down and mind her own business or she can lose her position here in Belarus ahead of schedule."

"I want to warn the Americans for the first and last time that we will react quite fiercely, and, trust me, they will lose their positions not only in Belarus."

"We will survive. We will do without the American dollar. The Americans don't like what we are doing with their currency -- we can get rid of the dollar. But they constantly try to harass us; it won't work. You see, they don't like it that we are working in Venezuela. OK, give us a chance and we will work in America. We go where we are welcome and where we can receive the biggest effect for our economy from our presence."

Presidential Administration, MFA Have Little Response

¶3. (C) Charge called Presidential Administration Foreign Policy Advisor Valentin Rybakov for a confirmation and comment December 30. Rybakov was unaware of the statements and did not respond. On December 31, Charge spoke separately by phone with both Rybakov and MFA North America Department Head Sergey Sergeyev to relay the following points, consistent with ref B: 1) Ambassador Stewart had stated on December 13 -- and been quoted accurately -- that the USG would continue to expand sanctions against the Belarusian regime in the event that there was no progress on democratic reforms; 2) any step taken to expel Ambassador Stewart from Belarus would be met with a reciprocal step to remove Belarusian Ambassador Khvostov from the U.S.; and 3) that EUR DAS Kramer planned to relay the same points to Ambassador Khvostov in Washington. Both Rybakov and Sergeyev were aware of Lukashenko's statements, but could not provide any response other than to thank Charge for his points; Sergeyev pledged to share them with MFA leadership as soon as possible (December 31 is a local holiday).

Draft Press Guidance

MINSK 00001064 002 OF 002

¶4. (SBU) Post proposes the following draft press guidance for response to press inquiries on Lukashenko's December 30 threats.

-- We are aware of the statements made by Aleksandr Lukashenko to the Belarusian press December 30 on U.S. sanctions against the Belarusian regime.

-- The U.S. Ambassador to Belarus, Karen Stewart, noted December 13 that if the Lukashenko regime failed to release political prisoners and take other steps towards democratic reform, additional sanctions would be imposed.

-- This is a clear expression of our consistent policy on Belarus and we stand by Ambassador Stewart's statement.

-- The keys to improved U.S.-Belarus relations remain the Belarusian regime's release of all political prisoners and its respect for basic democratic norms, including free elections and freedom of expression and association.

Comment

¶5. (C) While Lukashenko's December 30 remarks have every appearance of being spontaneous and uncoordinated, they nevertheless reflect his growing unease at the possibility of additional U.S. economic sanctions. (Note: In comparison, as reported previously, most GOB interlocutors have gone out of their way to claim that the sanctions have had no impact. End note.) That Lukashenko blames Belarus' "shift from the dollar," or its relations with Venezuela for these sanctions, is as absurd as it is groundless. The fact that Lukashenko continues to look for external, geopolitical factors to explain U.S. sanctions is just more evidence that he is unprepared to take the political steps necessary to roll them back.

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